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Farmers Markets are a source of nutritious foods with locally grown fruits and vegetables and other products.

SNAP Saved at Farmers Markets

Food Bank helps keep low-income shoppers connected

Serving low income community members is a labor of love for farmers markets. But closure of a widely-used Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) processor had threatened access to the markets for people using benefits from their SNAP/Oregon Trail cards.

But thanks to help from the Oregon Food Bank to cover costs of the transition, the charitable arm of Portland Farmers Market announced last week that SNAP recipients will not be turned away when shopping at Oregon farmers markets.

Processing SNAP benefits comes with federal restrictions which demand meticulous re-

cord-keeping and out-of-pocket costs for equipment and processing fees. Recently, Novo Dia Group, a financial transaction processor contracted with 1,700 farmers markets around the nation, made national news when they announced their closure as of Aug. 31. This left 20 Oregon farmers markets scrambling for a speedy replacement in order to avoid turning SNAP shoppers away.

Solutions existed – but they had some big costs for farmers markets, including set-up, per use and monthly processing fees. Additionally, capital costs for hardware can run up to \$900 per unit.

Since an alternative was needed quickly and farmers markets are

low budget operations, the Oregon Food Bank stepped-in to help by committing up to \$10,000 to assist individual markets in determining needs, purchasing hardware and paying fees for their new SNAP processing contracts.

“Oregon Food Bank believes that no one should be hungry and that everyone deserves healthy, fresh food in order to thrive,” said Oregon Food Bank Chief Executive Officer Susannah Morgan. “These core organizational values made the decision to support SNAP access at local farmers markets very straightforward. Farmers markets help strengthen local food systems and bring our wonderful-ly varied communities together

– these are critical avenues to addressing hunger at its root causes.”

There are 130 farmers markets in Oregon; 70 of them also offer extra cash to low income shoppers using their SNAP/Oregon Trail cards. Most offer a dollar for dollar match up to \$10, which boosts the buying power for low income households, enabling shoppers to buy more local fruits and vegetables.

“Nearly all SNAP shoppers at farmers markets tell us how important the program has been for them to eat more nutritious foods. That’s why it’s so important for us to help markets continue accepting SNAP without interruption,” says Molly Notarianni, program

director of the Farmers Market Fund.

In the next few weeks, Farmers Market Fund will partner with Oregon Farmers Market Association to assure that each market impacted by the Novo Dia closure is identified and will get the help they need.

“Everyone’s goal is to make sure there is no break in service at any market for any SNAP customers, and this contribution will help make that goal achievable,” says Kelly Crane, Program Director, Oregon Farmers Markets Association. “We are really inspired by the way that the farmers market community and food system partners have all come together to find a fix for this situation.”